M&O
Serials
QL 671
.G84

THE MONTHLY GULL BULLETIN

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

VOLUME 13 SAN FRANCISCO, OCTOBER, 1931 NUMBER 10

Analysis of Pellets of Barn Owls

On April 12, 1931, a visit was made by Cranson Hopkins and myself to the Barn Owl "roosts" which Mr. C. W. Lockerbie located some time ago near South San Francisco. Our object was to find out if these owls were nesting. We found the nests of three Barn Owls and were able to reach two of them. Forty-one pellets were collected from these two nests. I dissected these pellets and found one hundred and nine skulls. These pellets averaged between two and three skulls apiece; some having only one, and some as many as five. Two of the skulls, one of a brush rabbit and one of a pocket gopher, were not enclosed in pellets. Both were lying about twenty feet from the nest, where they had evidently been washed by rain. Hair was found in both skulls in such a position as to indicate that they had once formed parts of a pellet. The rabbit skull measured 2⅝ inches (67 mm.), by 1¼ inches (32 mm.), by 1¼ inches (32 mm.). These dimensions show what an enormous throat an owl possesses. A golf ball is only one-fourth of an inch greater in diameter. For a person to equal this feat, it would be necessary to swallow an object measuring 4¼ by 4¼ by 8¾ inches.

Through the courtesy of Dr. J. O. Snyder, Head of the Zoology Department of Stanford University, I was given an opportunity to identify these skulls. Those of the shrew were identified by Mr. Benson of the University of California.

Following is a summary of the results:

Sorex vagrans halicoetes—Salt Marsh Shrew(?)	3
Reithrodontomys megalotis longicauda—Long-tailed Harvest Mouse	2
Peromyscus maniculatus gambeli—Gambel's White-footed Mouse	21
Neotoma fuscipes annectens—Portola Wood Rat	1
Microtus californicus californicus—California Meadow Mouse	79
Thomomys bottae bottae—California Pocket Gopher	2
Sylvilagus bachmani ubercolor—Redwood Brush Rabbit	1

In addition to the skulls, remains of two insects were found; one, a blue-bottle fly, the other, a Jerusalem cricket or potato-bug. Unfortunately, the pellets were all mixed together and it was not possible to segregate them as, to which of the two nests they came from.

While dissecting the pellets, I found a small grub. By the time all the pellets had been dissected, grubs had been found in eighteen of them. Two chrysalises had also been found. Several grubs and one chrysalis were preserved, and the rest put into a small jar to hatch. So far, eight adults have emerged. They are curious moths. Their black wings and white head form a very striking color pattern. In size they are just under that of the common house moth. They seemed to prefer the older, more broken down pellets, though it is possible that they themselves caused the broken down condition. The moth was sent to Dr. Hermes of the University of California, who has identified it as Trechophaga tapetzella. Clarence F. Smith, San Francisco, June 6, 1931.

Hummers Learning to Hum

Last March we had the fascinating experience of watching an Allen Hummingbird nesting in a coast redwood, Sequoia sempervirens.

With fine discrimination she had chosen an outer fork of a limb, about fifteen feet from the ground, well sheltered by the other drooping branches. It was in clear view of our vantage point within a newly built house. Here we could watch her constant attention to the two tiny fluffs which she hatched between March 7, when we found the nest with its two eggs, and the fourteenth, when we were first sure they had hatched.

That pumping of partly digested food into their ever ready little gullets is a startling thing each time you see it. She was a faithful, devoted little mother, convincing evidence of the utter uselessness of a male in the care of offspring!

Knowing that the lovely, lichen-covered nest had about all it could hold, and that it was but a matter of hours until we should have her nestlings no longer—on March 26 at 10:30 p. m. we took a photo-flash picture, getting a really good one. Where Mother Hummer was we could not say, but at least she is not in the picture; which may or may not prove that even young hummers are not always pampered. The placing of a ladder against the tree was necessary, which, though done in the dark, probably frightened her away, but we neither saw nor heard her that night.

Between this time and early morning of the 28th, one of the young took flight without human eye to see. The morning of the 28th from 8:55 until 10:30 we watched breathless. No mother coaxing her first born to take its initial step was more concerned than Mother Hummer fluttering about, apparently coaxing the second tiny thing to really "take off" from the edge of the nest where it was perched after she had fed it. Seven minutes by the watch it poised there before she was rewarded.

In just ten minutes this juvenile returned, alighted on the side of the nest, looked all around, then settled down in the nest very contentedly as though happy to be home again. While he was away Mother Hummer returned to the nest, pecked inside it, looking about carefully and expectantly. After his return she fed him, pecked at the nest again, and flew away, the young following her this time. Immediately the juvenile came back, but was off again. This he did twice in as many minutes.

Within two minutes the mother was back, perched on the branch she had used all through the nesting time, a bare one near the nest. Alighting on the side of the nest she threw out one piece of egg shell and one feather. Her house cleaning completed she again flew away.

Then it was I discovered where the young had been going. On the outside of the tree they were perched side by side, preening themselves and working very hard at it. Youth making its first toilet! They would fly away from the tree, go back and perch on the edge of the nest, but never again did they settle down within it.

For forty-five minutes more they were busy preening themselves, buzzing up to a redwood branch for all the world as if they expected to find something to eat. When they perched beside Mother Hummer, three in a row in the sunshine on a bare limb, above the nest and outside the immediate home grounds, it was a thrilling sight. They were out of the nest safely; they were fed and preened and ready to face the world, as it were. Such a homey sight! Until 10:30 they were all about. How much longer we might have had such a sight I do not know. Another outdoor enthusiast climbed the ladder taking a daylight picture of the mother perched on the side of the nest after the young birds had flown. The two young allowed all this, but when he tried to make himself more secure by throwing his leg over the branch they could not tolerate that. It was too much. Their wings were strong now. This invasion of their privacy was not to be overlooked. Our priceless hour and a half of breathlessly watching the fledglings fly had to end.

Now we could only look at the lovely nest, a work of art, clean as a pin, and hope that after a winter in Central America, Mother Allen's babies, grown up, would come nesting in the redwood another spring. Anna Margaret Smith, San Anselmo, California. September 19, 1931.

Anna Hummer: On March 15, on the bridle path at Lake Merced, about 200 feet north of the gate, my attention was called to a little puff of dust which proved to be made by a male Anna Hummer, which made twenty-two swoops into the dust of the trail, every time but once going up on a limb of a eucalyptus tree and industriously preening himself, and in one case the third from the last dive dusting himself twice. It would seem evident that the bird was infested with vermin and I would appreciate any information that other observers may have had. Carl R. Smith, San Francisco, California.

The September Field Trip was taken on Sunday, the 20th, to the mud-flats, near El Cerrito, Contra Costa County. The day was clear, calm and very warm. The long continued dry spell, together with recent industrial developments along the shores of San Francisco Bay, have taken away the areas which our Association has formerly visited to study shore birds. Areas where the shore birds now congregate in large numbers are under private control and the situations are such that it is impossible for large groups of people to visit them.

Our visit to El Cerrito afforded some interest but left much to be desired. Only seven species of shore birds were noted.

One always associates Sanderlings with a sandy beach where they run out to meet, and then make a hasty retreat to escape, an incoming wave. Here they were at rest on the mud-flats.

A lone Marbled Godwit was conspicuous, also a Red-backed Sandpiper. Western Sandpipers were present in large numbers with an occasional Semipalmated Plover among them.

Among the land birds noted along the route to the mud-flats were two Vaux Swifts, presumably migrants. Early arrivals were represented by a Say Phoebe, Fox Sparrows and Pipits.

Among a flock of Savannah Sparrows were a sparrow, noticeably larger, lacking the yellow stripes in the face and showing white outer tail feathers in flight. These characteristics together with other markings and mannerisms were those of a Vesper Sparrow, a rather rare winter visitant in the San Francisco Bay Region.

A total of forty-four species noted:

Farallon Cormorant
Black-crowned Night Heron
Marsh Hawk
Sparrow Hawk
Semipalmated Plover
Killdeer
Red-backed Sandpiper
Western Sandpiper
Marbled Godwit
Sanderling
Northern Phalarope
Western Gull
California Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Forster Tern
Vaux Swift
Anna Hummingbird
Red-shafted Flicker
Say Phoebe
Black Phoebe
Western Flycatcher
Wood Pewee
California Jay
Plain Titmouse
Bush-tit
Wren-tit
Bewick Wren
Pipit
Shrike
Warbling Vireo
Yellow Warbler
Meadowlark
Brewer Blackbird
House Sparrow
Linnet
Green-backed Goldfinch
Spotted Towhee
Brown Towhee
Savannah Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Fox Sparrow
Junco
Nuttall Sparrow
Song Sparrow

C. A. Bryant, historian.

Audubon Notes

October Meeting will be held on Thursday, the 8th, at 8 p. m., room 19, 2nd floor, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mr. George Tonkin, U. S. Game Protector, Bureau of Biological Survey. Subject: "Migratory Birds and Federal Laws."

October Field Trip will be taken Sunday, the 11th, to Lake Merced. East Bay members should reach San Francisco about 8:30 a. m. Take municipal car K, transfer to M car at St. Francis Loop beyond Twin Peaks Tunnel, get off at Junipero Serra Boulevard, where party will form at 9:30 a. m. Bring luncheon and filled canteens. Leader C. A. Bryant.

Special Notice: To meet a growing demand for a bird study class on Saturday afternoons it has been decided to have one trip a month on the Saturday following the regular monthly field trip. These trips will be led by members advanced in bird knowledge and will be devoted to a closer study than is possible on the Sunday trips. The first trip will be taken October 17th to Lake Temescal. San Francisco members take one o'clock Key Route boat and train to 40th and Broadway. East Bay members meet at 2 o'clock at the junction of Broadway and College Avenue. F. M. Jencks, Leader.

September Meeting: The 175th regular meeting was held on September 10th, in room 19, Ferry Building, with twenty-nine members and guests present. President Brighton C. Cain presiding.

The following new members were elected: Mrs. Edgar M. Kierulff and Mr. Eugene B. Bizzell of San Francisco; Mr. Jas. R. Davis, Berkeley.

Field observations were reported as follows:

Mrs. Stephens: August 23, Chain of Lakes, Western Sandpipers; September 9th, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Slender-billed Nuthatches.

Miss Werner: September 1, Manzanita, Townsend Warblers.

Miss Danz: September 8, Ross, Cedar Waxwings; Phoenix Lake, three Wood Ducks.

Miss Pringle: September 7, Clay and Buchanan Streets, San Francisco, Western Gnatcatchers.

Mrs. Otis H. Smith: August 29 to 31, Salmon Creek Road and at Ross, Tanagers.

Harold Swanton: August 23, near Mill Valley, ten White-throated Swifts.

Mr. Walter R. Welch, of the Division of Fish and Game, gave a very interesting talk contrasting the plentifulness of game in California years ago with the pitiful remnant of today. In earlier years there were literally millions of ducks, geese and game birds. Now this great abundance has disappeared and were it not for effective work of the Division in protecting game and in establishing game farms there would soon be no game at all. Farmers have been influenced to set aside a part of their lands as quail sanctuaries; 1000 of these have been established.

Mr. Welch told how certain groups of our foreign population trap birds by means of nets. These nets are sometimes as large as 150 by 50 ft. and stretched across an arroyo may catch as many as 500 birds. The nets are imported, but since there is no Federal law against them but only a State law, the authorities must rely upon the cooperation of the custom officials and endeavor to seize and confiscate the nets after they are in the country.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

President..... Brighton C. Cain.....221 Thayer Bldg., Oakland
Corresponding Secretary..... C. B. Lastreto.....260 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.
Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, Editor, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.
Subscription to monthly Bulletin, $1.00 per year. Single copies, 15c.
Membership dues, payable January 1st, $3.00 per year.
Student memberships, $1.50 per year. Life memberships, $50.00
Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.